1:Srinivas E-5 (1940-42)1952 AW5 Coorg AW5

villagers on a ritual occasion. If the institution of caste has a tendency to lay stress on 'horizontal unity', the harvest festival tends to counterpoise it by stressing the unity of the village.

VI

The nuclear unit of Coorg society is the *okka* or patrilineal joint family, and only the male members of an *okka* have any rights in the ancestral estate. Women born in the *okka* leave it on marriage, while the women who come into it by marriage have extremely limited rights in the ancestral estate. No woman may be head of an *okka*. A Coorg proverb says, 'a woman may not be the head of an *okka*, and a bitch may not be given a share of the game it helps to kill in a hunt'.[1]

Only sons can continue the *okka*. But when there are no sons, a daughter, or widow of a dead son is married in either the *okka parijé* or *makka parijé* way (see pp. 129–30), which has the effect of granting the children of either form of union membership of their mother's natal *okka*. If it is not possible to perpetuate the *okka* in either of these ways, a boy from another *okka* is adopted.

There is a sexual division of labour, men generally doing the work outside the house while women do the work inside. The tasks done by men are in a vague way regarded as superior to those done by women. The men cultivate or supervise the cultivation of land by low-caste labourers. However, agriculture is not, and has never been, their sole occupation. The army has always attracted Coorgs, and nowadays educated Coorgs are to be found in every profession.

Village-assemblies and *nāḍ*-assemblies were formerly vigorous institutions and only men normally took part in them. The men went in annual caravans to Malabar, in the dry season, to sell their surplus rice and buy salt, jaggery, coconut, coconut oil, tobacco, and fish. They also had the privilege and duty of conducting the elaborate festivals of village-deities and calendar festivals such as the harvest festival.

Coorg women's activities are on the whole confined to the house. They cook food for the twenty or thirty members of the *okka*. They look after the children and servants, the storing of food, the raising of pig and fowl, and so on. The younger women have to bring

[1] Even today at a collective hunt bitches are not entitled to any share in the meat of the hunted animal, while each of the dogs is given a share.

1:Srinivas E-5 (1940-42)1952 AW5 Coorg AW5

462 596 water from the domestic pond or well and carry manure in reed baskets to the fields.

562 [521] The sexes are generally segregated. The outer veranda serves as a club for the men, and they sit down on the benches there, drinking, chewing betel, and talking. The women rarely visit the veranda.[1] Similarly, men rarely join the women who are all presumably sitting in the kitchen, or in one of the inner rooms. [264] Men and women dine separately, the women dining after the men.

[574] When relatives visit a Coorg house, the men guests join the men hosts in the veranda, whereas the women guests join the women hosts in an inner part of the house. During the harvest [533] festival and festival of the village-deities the men sing and dance while the women watch them from a distance. Usually the men [791] play a more active part in the festivals than the women. There is an oracle in the festival of every village-deity, and the oracles are usually men. Women oracles are indeed rare, but where they function they are important.

562 684 Women are expected to observe a stricter code of conduct than men. For instance, formerly, a Coorg woman who had committed adultery with a low-caste man was summarily thrown out of caste, whereas a lapse on the part of a man was not treated with equal seriousness. Again, there was some difference in the punishment meted out to a man and woman: a man was liable to be fined or excommunicated, whereas excommunication was the only punishment for a woman.

182 562 Different ideals are held up for men and women. Strength, skill in fighting and hunting, and courage are admired in a man. A proverb states, 'men should die on the battlefield, and women should die in child-bed'. The killer of a tiger or panther and mother of ten children were both accorded the honour of a *mangala* ceremony. (See Chapter III.)

562 Formerly women seem to have enjoyed greater freedom than they do nowadays. Elderly informants remember that even as recently as fifty years ago women used to sing and beat cymbals in public on festive occasions. Coorg folksongs tell us of women who killed tigers and held assemblies of men to ridicule. In some folk-

[342] [1] Frequently a Coorg house has a separate entrance which enables the women to move in and out of the house without being seen by the men who are gathered in the veranda.

1:Srinivas E-5 (1940-42)1952 AW5 Coorg AW5

when a girl is married she passes from her mother to her husband. Her mother is the person for whom she has the greatest affection, and the replacement of the mother's purse by the groom's purse explains much better what happens than mere words can.

After performing *mūrta* to the bride, the groom helps her to get up, and walks with her to the door of the kitchen. He crosses the threshold first, and then, standing on the outer side of the threshold, he offers his right hand to the bride standing in the kitchen. The bride takes his right hand with her right hand and then crosses the threshold. This act symbolizes her exit from her natal home: the kitchen is the normal sphere of activity of a woman, and it stands for and is associated with women in the minds of ordinary people. Thus when the groom helps the bride to cross the threshold of the kitchen of her natal house, the participants are made to realize the loss occasioned to the bride's natal *okka* at marriage.

The bridal pair go in state to the groom's house. The bride salutes the sacred wall-lamp, and then sits on a sacred bench in the central hall, after which she salutes the elders in the groom's house.[1] Normally a woman may not sit on the sacred benches either in the central hall or veranda, and when an exception is made in the case of the bride it is as a recognition of the fact that she has acquired membership in the groom's *okka*.

Later, the bride goes with two married women to the cattle-shed where three new reed-baskets, filled with cow-dung, are kept. Each carries a basket to the groom's rice-fields and empties it in one of the ridged-up plots where rice is grown.

Accompanied by her two companions the bride then goes to the domestic well. She worships the water in the well, and this is called *ganga pūja* or 'worship of the Ganges'. Each of the three women carries a vessel of water to the kitchen.

The duties of a woman normally include carrying manure to the fields and fetching water from the domestic well. When the bride carries manure to the groom's fields and carries water into the kitchen of his house she is doing something which she will have to do every day for the rest of her life. She ritually takes up her duties in her husband's house, and frequently on ritual occasions two people accompany the subject in the tasks he or she performs. The reed-baskets are left at the field for Poleya servants of the

[1] In some parts of Coorg she also salutes the south-western pillar and the lamp in the south-western room.

3:Iyer E-5 (no date) 1948 AW5 Coorg AW5

Hunting and Fishing

The Coorgs have been skilful hunters, and still keep up their hunting habits. Their chief weapons were the gun and the big knife in addition to the small handy waist knife. They no longer use the bow and arrow, or the sling. The long matchlock gun has gone out of use, and the wealthier Coorgs are now equipped with English guns and rifles of the best kind. The big broad-bladed curved Coorg knife, *odikathi*, is a most formidable weapon in a hand-to-hand fight. The bulk of them hunt partly for sport, and partly to supplement their vegetable diet. Pigs are coursed with dogs, brought to bay, and killed with spears, which are short, heavy, and broad in the blade, or with ordinary fighting spears. Old boars fight fiercely, and hunters are sometimes wounded or killed. Most animals are trapped. When they go hunting in a party, they have dogs which are set on tracking. When they bark, and the hunters approach, the animal is disturbed. It tries to run away or charges them. In the latter case they aim at the animal with guns and kill it.

In their spare moments the Coorgs fish in streams, rivers and tanks. They use nets. The ordinary one is the *thadusala* which is spread across the stream to prevent fish from escaping. At a distance of about a furlong, they spread another net so as to drive the fish within the net. When the nets are brought closer, many fish are caught by hand. They use also another net known as *beesvala* by which they catch fish by shooting and throwing baits.

Dietary

The Coorgs have an abundant variety of food materials. They eat pigs and goats. Their chief article of food is rice, and on festive occasions cakes and sweetmeats are prepared. Earthenware vessels are used. Their kitchens are remarkable for the cleanliness of their cooking vessels in use which are in charge of the cook. Like their Hindu sisters, the Coorg women attend on elderly members before they take meals. Before serving the meals, a little of the cooked food is offered to the family deity at the Kanni-kombara. They take an early breakfast of rice seasoned with curds and pickles. A substantial meal is taken at noon with rice and curry. At 3 p.m. kanji is again taken, and in the evening a hearty meal of boiled rice with vegetable and meat curry and other condiments. Toddy tapped from the bastard sago palm, arrack and a kind of beer made of fermented rice, brandy are the usual beverages. Of late European liquors have become common beverages at festivities.

Coorg Hospitality

The Coorg women deserve much for their industry. They rise very early, clean the kitchen, and do all kinds of work. They bear the

brunt of the labour on the farm. The men plough the fields, transplant, and reap the rice. The women carry the manure, pluck weeds and clean the paddy. The men do no menial work. They leave that to women and servants, and enjoy a dignified repose chewing betel and gossiping. Some are expert tailors. Others with gun on shoulder wander through the jungle in search of game.

The Coorgs are noted for their hospitality and they enjoy visits from friends and relations. Should a male guest arrive, the men of the house meet him at the *kayale* and exchange greetings. The method of doing so is by both sexes alike and is very charming. The salutant being always the younger, stoops down, and touches the feet of the other who rests his head on the person concerned and blesses him. Meanwhile, the cook has spread a mat or carpet on the verandah bench, where he rests after washing his feet. He is then served with a chew, and later on with a meal, after which is discussed the special business of his visit. On his return, he pays his parting salutation in the above manner to the old men and women of the house, and the young men accompany him for some distance and take leave of him in the same manner.

When a female guest arrives, the cook or any other woman of the household meets her with a vessel of water and after saluting takes the kerchief from the guest's head and conducts her into the inner hall where she is received by the women, who enter into a free and hearty flow of conversation without any formalities. On leaving the house, the guest's kerchief is returned to her and an old man of the house with one or two women accompany her some distance. These visits of women are never made without the knowledge of their husbands, and they are always accompanied by some old man or female servant.

Dress

The principal dress of a Coorg consists of a long coat of dark coloured cloth open in front and reaching below the knees. The sleeves end below the elbow and show the arms of a white shirt which is generally of the English pattern. This is folded across and confined at the waist by a red or blue girdle wound several times round and round, and knotted at the left front. On the right front, the Coorg short knife is stuck to the girdle having an ivory or silver handle, and fastened with silver chains. The large broad-bladed waist knife (*odikathi*) is very rarely worn. Its place is at the back, where it is carried in a brass clasp with its point directed towards the left shoulder. Like the kukri of the Gurkhas, it was a formidable weapon in hand-to-hand fighting. It is now used as a test of skill and strength on festive occasions, as when a bridegroom is expected to cut through the trunk of a plantain tree at one stroke. Their head-dress is a red kerchief or the beauti-

4: Richter M, G-5 (ca. 1856-1870) 1870 AW5 Coorg AW5

292 the same time gives vent to their vexation at the intractability of these rude mountaineers.

The head with its raven-hair is covered by a white muslin or coloured kerchief, one end of which encircles the forehead and the two corners are joined together at the back, allowing the rest of the cloth to fall gracefully over the shoulders. 301 [556] The wealth of a Coorg family is displayed by the richness of the ornaments of the women. Glass, silver or gold bracelets of a simple description span their wrists; their neck is decked with chains of coral, pearls or gold from which are suspended old Portuguese gold coins. Even the nose and the outer rein[1] of the ears are ornamented with pretty jewellery in gold, pearls and precious stones, and also silver rings are worn on the toes.

292 531 The white festive gowns of the men, as well as the kerchiefs of the women, are skilfully embroidered along the seams and in the corners with red marking cotton and the patterns of native design are often very elegant. The Coorg women esteem their own embroidery more than Berlin work, as the former unlike the latter shows the pattern equally well on both sides.

• 462 As for industry the Coorg women deserve high praise. They rise early and besides cooking and other domestic work, they bear a large share in the labours of the farm. The men plough the fields, transplant and reap the rice; the women carry manure, weed, fetch home and clean the paddy. The [357] men do no menial work, they leave that to their women and [562] to their servants, whilst they enjoy a dignified repose, dis- [554] cussing the affairs of the house and chewing betel, or stitching a piece of clothing in which art many are as expert as professional tailors, others, gun on shoulder, wander through the jungles in search of game, but the height of their ambition is to figure in the capacity of a Government Official in the administration of their country.

[1] [Errata: This should read "rim". See corrigenda, Cat. 116, p. 473--Analyst]